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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001492

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: THAKSIN REPORTEDLY BIDDING HIS TIME

REF: A. BANGKOK 1249 (CHATURON PROSECUTION THREAT)  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 232 (STRONGER LINE)  
[1](#)C. 06 BANGKOK 7594 (CASES AGAINST THAKSIN)

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor David R. Greenberg, reason: 1  
.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has canceled some media interviews and wants to lower his profile, according to Noppadol Pattama, Thaksin's lawyer and spokesman. Noppadol told us Thaksin wanted to signal his commitment to quit politics, in order to boost the chances that he and his family would receive fair treatment from the Thai government. Thaksin reportedly wants to avoid blame for the Surayud administration's "self-destruction," and he does not want to return to Thailand before national elections. Noppadol, who takes precautions to ensure his physical safety, believes that most charges against Thaksin are not supported by evidence but are politically driven; trials will likely go on for years, if the government decides to prosecute. End Summary.

THAKSIN LOWERING PROFILE  
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[1](#)2. (C) According to Noppadol Pattama, the lead lawyer and spokesman of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Thaksin has recently canceled several interviews with international media outlets (including the BBC and Financial Times). Noppadol told us in a March 12 meeting that Thaksin decided that he should lower his profile. Consistent with this decision, Noppadol had also stopped holding press conferences; his last had been in early February. Noppadol also said there had been a noticeable drop-off in attendance at his press conferences, and the ensuing media reporting on his positions, after General Winai Phattiyakul, one of the coup leaders, instructed broadcasters not to air the statements of Thaksin and his cohorts (ref B).

[1](#)3. (C) Noppadol said Thaksin had adopted this low-key approach because he did not want to be blamed for causing further divisions in Thailand. He wanted to avoid a perception that he was accelerating what Noppadol termed as the government's "self-destruction." (Note: There is a widespread perception of mismanagement and poor coordination in Surayud's administration. End Note.)

14. (C) Additionally, Thaksin felt that a quieter approach would signal the sincerity of his professed desire to quit politics. Noppadol claimed there was "an understanding" -- although not a deal per se -- that, in exchange for Thaksin demonstrating a cooperative attitude, Thaksin and his family would be entitled to a "fair and legal process" in connection with alleged misdeeds and the disposition of their assets. Noppadol told us that this understanding had emerged from a phone conversation between Thaksin and Surayud, weeks if not months ago. He added that Thaksin had determined it would be best to remain abroad until after the next national elections.

15. (C) We noted that, despite Noppadol's claim that Thaksin sought a lower profile, a new pro-Thaksin website (Hi-Thaksin.net) had appeared. Noppadol said this site had been established by unknown "fans" of Thaksin, rather than by the deposed PM or his close associates. However, Noppadol told us Thaksin had recorded a message of gratitude to his supporters, to be posted on the site. (Note: On February 13, the press reported that a video clip on the Hi-Thaksin site featured Thaksin offering to provide assistance to Thai students in financial distress; on the same day, the website became temporarily inaccessible, for reasons we could not determine. End Note.)

#### LEGAL CASES

16. (C) In a brief discussion of the wide range of legal cases against Thaksin and his family, Noppadol spoke disdainfully of the Asset Examination Commission (AEC) recommendation that Thaksin be charged in connection with the purchase of bomb scanners for the new Bangkok airport. Thaksin's role had

BANGKOK 00001492 002 OF 003

simply been to set a policy that the airport should be equipped with the best facilities available. Thaksin had no role in specific contracting acts. Noppadol further said the AEC was foolish to indicate that charges should be brought against Thaksin and his entire cabinet for having issued a cabinet resolution that authorized state funds to be spent on a large rubber tree project, notwithstanding constraints in existing laws. Prosecution for this matter would generate public sympathy for cabinet officials who clearly were not involved in malfeasance.

17. (C) Noppadol reiterated his previous explanation (ref C) that efforts to prosecute Thaksin for his wife's purchase of a large plot of land from a state body rested on a politicized interpretation of a vague legal provision. He emphasized that a trial on this matter would take two or three years, and he said he was optimistic that the legal proceedings would take place free of undue influence once an elected government was in place. Although the AEC had recommended prosecution on numerous counts, Noppadol noted that public prosecutors had yet to determine they would proceed with cases against Thaksin.

18. (C) When we asked whether anyone had hinted that it might be possible to privately negotiate for favorable treatment from the AEC, Noppadol told us that an unidentified person (NFI) had tried to arrange a private meeting with AEC Chairwoman Jaruwan Maintaka for Noppadol and/or other Thaksin associates. Noppadol said that his side declined to pursue this meeting, as the AEC's members were staunchly anti-Thaksin, so their position would be unlikely to change, and a meeting could lead to charges of attempted bribery. (Note: The AEC was established in the aftermath of the coup, specifically to pursue allegations of corruption by Thaksin and his associates. End Note.)

#### THAKSIN DOING WELL IN EXILE

19. (C) Noppadol said he had recently traveled to London to meet with Thaksin. Others, such as former Natural Resources

Minister Yongyuth Tiypairat, had also visited Thaksin there. Noppadol said Thaksin appeared to be in better condition than he had toward the end of his time in office. He joked the deposed PM now had "more time to spend his money." He also noted Thaksin did not closely monitor news from Thailand.

#### NOPPADOL'S SECURITY CONCERNS

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¶10. (C) Thaksin had provided Noppadol with an armored vehicle and a retired policeman to provide physical security. Noppadol said he had become aware of what he termed a credible threat that the authorities intended to kidnap him, and he had been under surveillance by persons he believed were associated with the Army. He said General Sonthi Boonyaratglin had offered to provide soldiers to protect him, but Noppadol declined this offer. He no longer slept at his prior home, out of concern for his safety.

#### KEEPING TRT AT A DISTANCE, FOR NOW

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¶11. (C) We asked whether Noppadol might become involved in defending Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party Leader Chaturon Chaiseng in the event of Chaturon's prosecution for violating restrictions on political party activities (ref A). Noppadol said he likely would not be involved in that case, as TRT preferred to distance itself from Thaksin, with whom Noppadol was now closely associated. However, Noppadol said he might consider running for parliament with TRT in the next election. (Paras 13-14 provide further biographic information on Noppadol.)

#### COMMENT

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¶12. (C) Noppadol can probably offer useful insight into Thaksin's thinking, but we take all he says with a heavy dose of salt. Since the September coup, Thaksin has varied the extent of his media exposure; most recently, his providing a video clip for a sympathetic website illustrates he is not

BANGKOK 00001492 003 OF 003

fading away. However, we do not doubt Noppadol's assertion that, so long as the government allows normal legal procedures to run their course, Thaksin's trials and appeals will drag on for years, and that the climate for these processes will become more favorable for Thaksin after a return to democratic governance. End Comment.

#### BIO NOTES

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¶13. (SBU) Noppadol stood for election with the Democrat Party (DP) in 1995, 1996, 2001, and 2005; he only won a seat in ¶1996. In 1995, then-opposition leader Chuan Leekpai appointed Noppadol as his Secretary. Chuan had previously appointed Noppadol to a House Sub-Committee in 1992, even though Noppadol was not an MP. He served as Secretary to Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan during Chuan's second administration, starting in 1997. In May 2006, Noppadol quit the DP and joined TRT. From June until September of 2006, Noppadol worked under Yongyuth Tiypairat as Vice Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment. Noppadol, who has his own law firm in Bangkok (Noppadol and Associates International Law Office), currently works solely on the Shinawatra family's legal cases.

¶14. (SBU) Noppadol was born on April 23, 1961, in the northeastern province of Nakhon Ratchasima. He graduated from the Thammasat University law school, received a (highly prestigious) King's Scholarship, and received a Master of Laws from London University and a Bachelor of Laws from Oxford University.

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